

THE BIG IDEAS

Extreme Ownership

What is it?

No Bad Teams

Only bad leaders.

A True Believer

Are you one?

Prioritize and Execute

Simplify + front-sight focus.

3 Alarm Clocks

Discipline = freedom.

Leading People

Challenging + gratifying.

"The book derives its title from the underlying principle—the mind-set—that provides the foundation for all the rest: Extreme Ownership. Leaders must own everything in their world. There is no one else to blame."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

Extreme Ownership

How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win

BY JOCKO WILLINK AND LEIF BABIN · ST. MARTIN'S PRESS © 2015 · 320 PAGES

"The idea for this book was born from the realization that the principles critical for SEAL success on the battlefield—how SEALs train and prepare their leaders, how they mold and develop high-performance teams, and how they lead combat—are directly applicable to success in any group, organization, corporation, business, and, to a broader degree, life. This book provides the reader with our formula for success: the mind-set and guiding principles that enable SEAL leaders and combat units to achieve extraordinary results. It demonstrates how to apply these directly in business and life to likewise achieve victory."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin from *Extreme Ownership*

Navy SEALs are the most highly trained, elite warriors on the planet.

And, Jocko Willink and Leif Babin were two of the most senior SEALs on the ground in the most intense battles of Iraq.

In this book, they share the U.S. Navy SEAL approach to leadership that allows them to Lead and Win.

The key?

EXTREME OWNERSHIP.

Absolutely owning everything in their world. Taking 100% responsibility for the success (and failure) of their missions—blaming no one and constantly seeking ways to improve.

As you can imagine, it's an intense look at extreme leadership with stories from the trenches (literally) of war and examples of how we can apply the ideas to our businesses and lives. (Get the book [here](#).)

The book is packed with Big Ideas and I'm excited to share a few of my favorites so let's jump straight in.

WHAT IS EXTREME OWNERSHIP?

"I explained that as the officer in charge of training for the West Coast SEAL Teams, we put SEAL units through highly demanding scenarios to get them ready for combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. When SEAL leaders were placed in worst-case-scenario training situations, it was almost always the leaders' attitudes that determined whether their SEAL units would ultimately succeed or fail. We knew how hard the training missions were because we had designed them.

In virtually every case, the SEAL troops and platoons that didn't perform well had leaders who blamed everyone and everything else—their troops, their subordinate leaders, or the scenario. They blamed the SEAL training instructor staff; they blamed inadequate equipment or the experience level of their men. They refused to accept responsibility. Poor performance and mission failure were the result.

"There are no negative repercussions to Extreme Ownership," I said. "There are only two types of leaders: effective and ineffective.

Effective leaders that lead successful, high-performance teams exhibit Extreme Ownership. Anything else is simply ineffective.

Anything else is bad leadership."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

The best-performing SEAL units had leaders who accepted responsibility for everything. Every mistake, every failure or shortfall—those leaders would own it. During the debrief after a training mission, those good SEAL leaders took ownership of failures, sought guidance on how to improve, and figured out a way to overcome challenges on the next iteration. The best leaders checked their egos, accepted blame, sought out constructive criticism, and took detailed notes for improvement. They exhibited Extreme Ownership, and as a result, their SEAL platoons and task units dominated."

As you may have guessed by the title, this book is all about taking 100% (!!!) responsibility for E.V.E.R.Y.T.H.I.N.G. in our lives.

When things don't go well, what do YOU do?

Whether it's at home or the office, do you *blame* the people around you for the problems or do you take EXTREME OWNERSHIP?

Know this: The easiest way to know that you are *not* taking Extreme Ownership is when you are BLAMING someone (or something) else for whatever problems you may be experiencing in your life.

Let's quit blaming. That's step 1 in taking extreme ownership.

Here's a powerful story to bring the point home.

THERE ARE NO BAD TEAMS, ONLY BAD LEADERS

"It was a shocking turn of events. Boat Crew VI, the same team in the same circumstances only under new leadership, went from the worst boat crew in the class to the best. Gone was their cursing and frustration. And gone too was the constant scrutiny and individual attention they had received from the SEAL instructor staff. Had I not witnessed this amazing transformation, I might have doubted it. But it was a glaring, undeniable example of one of the most fundamental and important truths at the heart of Extreme Ownership: there are no bad teams, only bad leaders."

That's from Chapter 2: "No Bad Team, Only Bad Leaders."

Leif tells us the fascinating story of the SEAL Hell Week training he supervised.

Bare in mind that Hell Week comes after several weeks of the SEAL basic training course. And, remember that, as Leif tells us, "Hell Week is not a fitness test. While it did require some athletic ability, every student that survived the weeks of BUD/S training prior to Hell Week had already demonstrated adequate fitness to graduate. It was not a physical test but a mental one."

Alright. So here's the story.

One of the most brutal aspects of the training is when the students are split into "boat crews"—each with seven guys. Each team gets assigned an old-school World War II-era inflatable boat that weighs 200 pounds. They need to carry this boat up and over 20-foot-high sand berms and run with it for miles. Then they get to paddle it out to the ocean, dump it over so everyone's out and freezing wet and then paddle it back in.

And...

They're always competing with everyone else. If you lose, you have to go through extra, bonus brutal stuff while the winners get to take the next race off. ("It pays to be a winner!" the instructors would constantly remind everyone.)

So, apparently, Boat Crew II just crushed it. They won every.single.race. Boat Crew VI, on the other hand, LOST every.single.race.

"Their success illustrated once again that leadership is the most important thing on any battlefield; it is the single greatest factor in whether a team succeeds or fails. A leader must find a way to become effective and drive high performance within his or her team in order to win. Whether in SEAL training, in combat on distant battlefields, in business, or in life: there are no bad teams, only bad leaders."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

While the Boat Crew II team worked together flawlessly and, although freezing and exhausted, they actually had smiles on their faces. Boat Crew VI was the opposite. They were cursing and blaming one another for all their problems.

I should mention that each boat crew had a leader—the most senior guy who was responsible for getting the complicated instructions on what to do in the next assignment and leading their team through the process.

The leader of Boat Crew VI was convinced that he was losing because his team sucked. He was certain that Boat Crew II was simply made up of the best guys and his team was not.

Now, our wise instructor knew that there was no such thing as a bad team, just a bad leader.

So, he devised a little experiment—commanding the leaders to swap teams. The leader from the always-winning Boat Crew II would now switch places with the leader from the always-losing Boat Crew VI.

What happened?

Well, as you can probably guess, the worst boat crew suddenly became the best. They went from losing nearly every race to winning nearly every race.

—> *No Bad Team, Only Bad Leaders.*

"The concept that there were no bad teams, only bad leaders was a difficult one to accept but nevertheless a crucial concept that leaders must fully understand and implement to enable them to most effectively lead a high-performance team. Leaders must accept total responsibility, own problems that inhibit performance, and develop solutions to those problems. A team could only deliver exceptional performance if a leader ensured the team worked together toward a focused goal and enforced high standards of performance, working to continuously improve. With a culture of Extreme Ownership within the team, every member of the team could contribute to this effort and ensure the highest levels of performance."

Let's shine the spotlight on you.

Whether it's at home or at work, do you ever think you're on a "bad" team?

Guess what. You're the problem. (HAH.) Quit blaming and criticizing and start taking EXTREME OWNERSHIP for the situation.

Find solutions. Make it better. Lead. Win.

P.S. Keep this gem from Darren Hardy's *Entrepreneur Roller Coaster* ([see Notes](#)) in mind: *"Here's a secret: People don't go as far as they can. They don't work as hard as they can either. They aren't as disciplined as possible. They aren't as positive-minded or enthusiastic as they can be. They're only as fast and disciplined as you are."*

As the leader, you set the pace. You create the standards. It doesn't matter if you're leading salespeople, engineers, or creatives. They will only be as disciplined, driven, focused, and consistent as the person leading them. The speed, quality, and culture of the pack are determined by the leader. That means the most important, but also the most underused and violated, principle of leadership is lead by example. ...

In 1944, the Allied generals gathered to discuss their battle plans for the D-Day invasion of Normandy. After listening to how each general was going to send his soldiers into battle, an angered Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, slammed his fist down, stood up, and placed a piece of string in the middle of the table.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'Do you see this string? This string is like an army. Push it from behind, and it doubles up on itself—you get nowhere. To drive it forward you have to pull it from the front, and it will follow you in perfect order.'

"As the U.S. Naval hero of the American Revolution and Father of the U.S. Navy, John Paul Jones, said: "Those who will not risk cannot win."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

ARE YOU A TRUE BELIEVER?

"In order to convince and inspire others to follow and accomplish a mission, a leader must be a **true believer** in the mission. Even when others doubt and question the amount of risk, asking, 'Is it worth it?' the leader must believe in the greater cause. If a leader does not believe, he or she will not take the risks required to overcome the inevitable challenges necessary to win. And they will not be able to convince others—especially the frontline troops who must execute the mission—to do so. Leaders must always operate with the understanding that they are part of something greater than themselves and their own personal interests. They must impart this understanding to their teams down to the tactical-level operators on the ground. Far more important than training or equipment, a resolute belief in the mission is critical for any team or organization to win and achieve big results."

What's your #1 project or mission right now?

This is it: _____

Got it? Great.

Are you a TRUE BELIEVER?

Do you have a RESOLUTE BELIEF in the mission?

Do you *KNOW* you can achieve it and believe it's a worthy goal to go after?

If not, as leaders we need to get that clarity or adjust our mission.

If we don't truly believe, there's *no way* we're going to effectively lead. Period.

P.S. Remember our Motivation Equation? The #1 variable is EXPECTANCY. You have to believe.

P.P.S. I've mentioned it a number of times since discovering the stat and I'm going to repeat it again here. Workers who have leaders that inspire hope in a better future are engaged 69% of the time. Those who do not have leaders that inspire hope are engaged a paltry 1% of the time.

That is *crazy*. And, the same rules apply here. If YOU want to be engaged in your life, you need to BELIEVE that things are going to work. If you want to lead your TEAM (biz/fam/whatever) you need to believe in the mission and share that belief. Are you?

PRIORITIZE AND EXECUTE

"When something goes wrong and it eventually does—complex plans add to confusion, which can compound into disaster. Almost no mission ever goes according to plan. There are simply too many variables to deal with. This is where simplicity is key."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

"On the battlefield, countless problems compound in a snowball effect, every challenge complex in its own right, each demanding attention. But a leader must remain calm and make the best decisions possible. To do this, SEAL combat leaders utilize Prioritize and Execute. We verbalize this principle with this direction: 'Relax, look around, make a call.'

Even the most competent of leaders can be overwhelmed if they try to tackle multiple problems or a number of tasks simultaneously. The team will likely fail at each of those tasks. Instead, leaders must determine the highest priority task and execute. When overwhelmed, fall back upon this principle: Prioritize and Execute."

That's from the chapter called "Prioritize and Execute."

Reminds me of wisdom from another SEAL Commander, Mark Divine. In *The Way of the SEAL* (see Notes), he tells us we need to "simplify the battlefield" and maintain "front-sight focus."

Here's how he puts it: "Maintaining a front-sight focus has a calming and confidence-building effect. A SEAL knows he must simply engage one target at a time and not shift focus until he's dispatched that target. SEALs don't like to waste ammo—we try to make each round count. This is far more effective than trying to engage multiple targets (or worry about them at the same time!). Admittedly, our training allows us to do this very fast and with incredible

"Leaders must determine the highest priority task and execute. When overwhelmed, fall back upon this principle: Prioritize and Execute."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

precision, making it appear as if we're tackling multiple targets simultaneously. Ultimately, all great successes follow this exact process: Identify a goal, and then achieve it by knocking down one target after another, each one the right target for that shot. When you learn to do this with the focus and precision of a SEAL, understanding which targets to engage and how to avoid distractions, your success will skyrocket. ...

Without front-sight focus, you're bound to get derailed and end up mired in common, day-to-day activities and thinking. Common thinking in combat can get you killed, but in everyday life it will simply kill any chance of your operating at the high level we expect for the Way of the SEAL."

When feeling overwhelmed, slow down. Simplify your battlefield.

Leif shares the story of how he applied this to the business environment and asked this question to a leader who was engaged in too many battles: "Of all the initiatives, which one do you feel is the most important?" I asked. "Which one is your highest priority?"

Identify the next key domino you need to knock over.

Then go crush it.

Prioritize and Execute.

HOW ARE YOUR 3 ALARM CLOCKS?

"Discipline equals freedom."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

"Discipline starts every day when the first alarm clock goes off in the morning. I say 'first alarm clock' because I have three, as I was taught by one of the most feared and respected instructors in SEAL training: one electric, one battery powered, one windup. That way, there is no excuse for not getting out of bed, especially with all that rests on that *decisive moment*. The moment the alarm goes off is the first test; it sets the tone for the rest of the day. The test is not a complex one: when the alarm goes off, do you get up out of bed, or do you lie there in comfort and fall back to sleep? If you have the *discipline* to get out of bed, you win—you pass the test. If you are mentally weak for that moment and you let that weakness keep you in bed, you fail. Though it seems small, that weakness translates to more significant decisions. But if you exercise discipline, that too translates to more substantial elements of your life."

First: Three alarm clocks?!?

Now THAT is Extreme Ownership. :o

That Idea is from a chapter called "Discipline Equals Freedom."

Jocko tells us that "By discipline, I mean an intrinsic self-discipline—a matter of personal will. The best SEALs I worked with were invariably the most disciplined."

In other words, a fierce commitment to areté.

We want to be aware of the "decisive moments" in our day-to-day lives. We need to win those "fight-thrus"—choosing to step forward into growth and show up as our better selves.

Jocko talks about the fact that, paradoxically, this extreme discipline actually leads to more freedom and more flexibility. With a solid base of disciplined procedures, they had the freedom to adapt a small portion of their approach when the situation demanded.

Plus: "Last, and perhaps most important, when things went wrong and the fog of war set in, we fell back on our disciplined procedures to carry us through the toughest challenges on the battlefield."

When YOU are faced with your biggest challenges, you want to be able to fall back on your disciplined consistency on your fundamentals—providing you with the stability to power you through the inevitable challenges.

Unfortunately, too often we STOP doing the very things that keep us in the game during the most challenging times when we need them the most.

Let's not do that. Here's to setting our three alarm clocks and experiencing the freedom that comes from discipline.

LEADING PEOPLE: CHALLENGING + GRATIFYING

"Leadership is simple, but not easy."

~ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

"While there is no guarantee of success in leadership, there is one thing that is certain: leading people is the most challenging and, therefore, the most gratifying undertaking of all human endeavors. So, with that humbling reward in the distance, embrace the burden of command and go forward onto your battlefield, in whatever arena that may be, with the disciplined resolve to take Extreme Ownership, lead, and win."

Those are the last words of the book.

—> *"Leading people is the most challenging and, therefore, the most gratifying undertaking of all human endeavors."*

Let's embrace the burden and opportunity of command with disciplined resolve as we take Extreme Ownership, lead and WIN.

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

**If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...**

[The Way of the SEAL](#)

[The Entrepreneur Roller Coaster](#)

[Resilience](#)

[Unbeatable Mind](#)

[Unleash the Warrior Within](#)

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.